

RESOLUTION MEMORIALIZING MARY DUKE BIDDLE TRENT SEMANS

- WHEREAS,** Mary Duke Biddle Trent Semans, recognized as the “godmother of Duke”, was born on February 21, 1920 in New York City to the late Mary Lillian Duke and Anthony J. Drexel Biddle, Jr.; and
- WHEREAS,** while still in her teens her family moved to Durham and for a short time they lived with her grandmother, Sarah P. Duke; and
- WHEREAS,** in 1936, at the age of 15, she enrolled at Duke University as a special student to study history--graduating three years later, and in 1938, married Dr. Josiah Trent who later became the chief of thoracic surgery at Duke; and
- WHEREAS,** after the death of her husband in 1948, Mrs. Mary Duke Biddle Trent later married Dr. James Semans, a professor of urology at Duke in 1953; and
- WHEREAS,** through these unions she was blessed with seven children: Mary, Sarah, Rebecca, Barbara, Jenny, Beth and James [16 grandchildren and 29 great-grandchildren]; and
- WHEREAS,** Mary Duke Biddle Trent Semans, a direct descendant of the founding family of Duke University, was the great-granddaughter of Washington Duke, granddaughter of Benjamin N. Duke and great-niece of Duke’s founder James Buchanan Duke; and
- WHEREAS,** Mrs. Semans was not only a heiress to vast wealth and extraordinary privilege, she was very compassionate about human rights, education, philanthropy and the arts; and
- WHEREAS,** her love and devotion for the Duke community was immeasurable serving as Trustee, Vice President, and President of the Duke Endowment (1960 to 2001); Trustee of Duke University (1961-1981); was a driving force behind the creation of the Duke-Durham Neighborhood Partnership and the Duke Nasher Museum of Art in which the atrium bears the name Mary D.B.T. Semans Great Hall; and
- WHEREAS,** Mary Duke Biddle Trent Semans made countless contributions and consistently supported Duke University and Duke Medicine through the Duke Endowment, the Mary Duke Biddle Foundation (begun by and named after her mother), was instrumental in the creation of the Josiah Charles Trent Memorial Foundation, Josiah Charles Trent Collection of the History of Medicine, Mary Duke Biddle Scholarship, and the renowned Benjamin N. Duke Scholarship, just to name a few; and

WHEREAS, her commitment of service and love spilled over to her “adopted hometown” of Durham when she became the first member of the Duke family to take an active role with the City of Durham—elected in 1951 as the first female to the City Council and served as Mayor Pro Tem (1953-1955); Trustee of Lincoln Community Hospital [a hospital to meet the needs of African-American patients in Durham (1948 to 1976)]; co-founder of the Durham Arts Council and the North Carolina School of the Arts; and

WHEREAS, she was the recipient of numerous awards, including the Duke University Medal, the National Brotherhood Award presented by the National Conference of Christians and Jews, the University Award from the University of North Carolina, John Tyler Caldwell Award for the Humanities, and the North Carolina Award for contributions to the arts; and

WHEREAS, Mary Duke Biddle Trent Semans lived a full and happy life until the age of 91 and will be remembered for her support of Duke, as a champion for the arts, civil rights, women's rights, social justice, and her love of humanity in the Durham community and beyond.

NOW, THEREFORE, BE IT RESOLVED BY THE DURHAM CITY COUNCIL:

1. That this City Council pauses in a moment of silence to honor the memory of Mary Duke Biddle Trent Semans for her devotion to the arts, education, human rights, health care and charities.
2. That this governing body pays tribute to Mary Duke Biddle Trent Semans for her contributions to Duke University, the Durham Community and State of North Carolina.
3. That this resolution be spread upon the official minutes of this governing body.
4. That a certified copy of this resolution be presented to her family.